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Response Paper 1, *The House of Mirth* Book 2: 1-4

In *The House of Mirth* by Edith Wharton, main character Lily Bart shows a lack of dignity and pride in herself by the way she allows people to take advantage of her. Dignity and pride are two of the most important characteristics a person can obtain. Having dignity is having self-respect and a feeling of self-worth. Taking pride in oneself means that a person can stand tall and defend the person that he or she is with confidence. These are important because to gain respect from others, people must respect and understand themselves first, which is a concept that Lily does not seem to grasp.

Lily is a young woman who is struggling to find true happiness because she is seeking it in wealth. She longs to marry a rich man who can effortlessly provide for her and give her the luxurious life she desires. Surprisingly, it is her astounding beauty that hinders her from being able to accomplish this task. The numerous men Lily encounters throughout her life are intrigued by her beauty and initially become friendly with her because of her looks. This causes her to be manipulated into situations that are unbeneficial for her, such as her trip to Europe on the *Sabrina* with the Dorsets. It is said in the first chapter of Book Two that “Lily’s only safeguard is that Bertha needs her badly…it’s necessary that George’s attention should be pretty continuously distracted (Wharton 152).” These few lines explain that because Mrs. Dorset is having an affair with Ned Silverton, she has brought Lily along on the trip to distract her husband so that she can get away without suspicion. Mrs. Dorset clearly traps Lily, manipulating the situation to seem as though Lily is having an affair with George, her husband. People believe this rumor, which directly affects Lily’s loved ones, and destroys her reputation as a good desirable woman. The talk of the town puts stress on Lily’s aunt, Mrs. Peniston, who apparently dies due to anxiety over Lily’s problems. This reverts back to the fact that one cannot gain respect from others without having self-respect. However, despite the backlash she receives, Lily does not do anything to defend herself. She shows no dignity or pride in herself, but instead comes off weak and easily manipulated. The result of her trip to Europe with the Dorsets was nothing but drama- everyone thinks that she and George Dorset are having an affair, causing people to dislike Lily and judge her.

Throughout all ages and cultures, women are taught to cater to men and depend on them for wealth and success. However, feminism has grown strong over the years, teaching women to stand up for themselves as powerful figures that can survive without a man for help. Lily could learn much from the feminists of the world. Though she lives alone, she is anything but independent. Instead of wishing for true love, Lily longs for material things that she believes will get her through life, such as money. In reality, Lily truly needs emotional support and love so that she can have more assurance of who she is, which will give her pride and dignity allowing her to have a happy life.